

Symbolism of the renaissance sculpture: Aedicule of Sholts-Volfovych townhouse in Lviv



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The specific conditions of architectural development in Lviv promoted the expansion of the Renaissance traditions in the architecture in the XVI century. A significant feature of a Renaissance architecture in Lviv lies in its abundant symbolic decoration of buildings. The façade of Sholts-Volfovych house which is situated in 23, Rynok Square in Lviv presents very interesting example.

Introduction

The specific conditions of Lviv architecture promoted the expansion of the Renaissance traditions in the architecture in the XVI century. At the same time, the local traditions considerably influenced the classical forms as well as techniques suggested by the Italian architects. The researchers note that just an abundant sculptural décor of townhouses' facades represents an exclusive feature of Lviv Renaissance architecture. Among the buildings worth attention is the Sholts Volfovychs' townhouse situated in 23, Rynok Square (Fig. 1). A lot of previous works, including the works of the author of this article, have already been dedicated to the attempts to decipher a semantic program of a building sculpture décor [1, 2, 3]. However, we seem not to be close to understanding the deep symbolism put by the authors of sculptures and décor as well.

The purpose of the article is to submit a novel author's interpretation of a sculptural group located in a corner aedicule of a second floor level. As a rule, such group has the term "Epiphany", but it is reasonable to suppose its symbolism to be wider and more meaningful.

Methodological approach is grounded on the principle of hermeneutic analysis: the interpretation of the non-material sources (written and descriptive). It concerns the analysis of the words and contents of the printed sources (in this case the dogmatic prayer "The Symbol of Faith") and their comparison with the compositional elements of aedicule.

Presentation of main material

The townhouse was erected in the middle of the 16-th century. Yan Sholts-Volfovych, originally from Silesia, came to Lviv in the second half of the 16-th century. After marriage he owned the part of the building as the dowry

of his bride who descended from the noble family of Gaze. In 1570 Yan Sholts-Volfovych redeemed the whole house and started its reconstruction and decoration. The author of the sculpture decor is believed to be Jan Zaremba, the disciple of dutch sculptor Herman van Hutte, whose patrons were Sholts-Volfovych. In 1595 the Sholts-Volfovych family was honored with the title Baron de Volfovych by the emperor Rudolf II. Probably, following this, they were able to afford to decorate the facades of the house with the alabaster portraits of their families [2, 3].

Recent studies determined that the sculptural decoration of the facade was built according to a four-level compositional scheme (though, the ground floor, which primary function was exclusively utilitarian, was not included in the decoration program):

– I level (1st floor) is decorated with the cartouches with quotes from the Bible and mascarons of lions. It reflects own-

ers' philosophy of life and their religious beliefs;

– II level (2nd floor) is decorated with the portrait mascarons of the owners and reveals the high social status of family members.

– III level (3rd floor) is decorated with the high reliefs of cherubim and waist sculpture of God the Father that symbolizes the heavenly level;

– IV level (space under the cornice) are the mascarons depicting God that symbolize the absolute presence of God.

Such a scheme has the whole system of meanings that dates back to the Middle Ages: the lower part is associated with earthly life, while the upper one with heavenly.

Research object of the article is the symbolism of the aedicule arranged on the second floor level and which is named "Epiphany" in a scientific literature (Fig. 2.). The composition includes the three parts:



Fig. 1. Renaissance townhouse situated in 23, Rynok Square in Lviv. Photo by S. Linda, 2021

- the lowest part – is a sculptural figure of the "Faith", placed beneath the aedicule pedestal;
- the middle part – is just aedicule where a sculpture group "Epiphany" is placed on the pedestal with the arms of the Sholts-Volfovychs and Gazes families as well as the two portrait Mascarons of the kin representatives, assembled into the pedestals of the flanking pilasters;
- the upper part – is the two Mascarons located above the aedicule between the roof supporting brackets.

We assume the allegoric figure of the "Faith" to be the clue to the content, put into the corner composition. The figure depicts a young woman who is leaning on the pillow with a left hand and holding the cross with the crucifix close to her shoulder (the fragment is almost lost). Her right hand held the chalice of the Holy Communion.

Now, let's consider an aedicule sculptural composition. The figures of Jesus Christ and St. John of the Cross are standing faced each other. The figure of Jesus Christ is lower, the feet aren't seen in the composition – he's standing in the water (the part of his right leg lower the knee is lost for today). His head is slightly leant forward. St. John of the Cross is standing on the stone therefore his figure looks almost a head taller than Jesus. St. John's right double handful stretched above the Jesus's head is half opened and turned so as if the water pours from it and the Jesus's hands take this water on his body. St. John of the Cross is covered with the cape made of camel fibers. The figure of Jesus is undressed and has only the loincloth. These details suggest not only about the fact that Jesus came to St. John of the Cross as an ordinary person, but also disclose the essence of earthly lifetime of Christ the Savior. The aedicule composition is crowned by the dove with its wings speeded.

From this field of view it should be reasonable to call this composition as the "Theophany". God the Lord is present in the three persons. Obviously that here the images above the aedicule, that is the Mascarons, are of great importance. These Mascarons aren't the only ones placed on the façade of the townhouse. On the first floor there are the three more Mascarons which, however have very specific portrait features. The Mascarons placed above the aedicule are more abstracted and generalized ones. The face on the left is neither old nor young rather adult. The hair and beard are curly like the clouds and the eyes are opened. This way the Hellenistic culture represented Zeus. We suppose God the Father to have been shown in our composition group just in the same way. The Mascarons to the right of the God the Father is turned towards the East. This image is also abstract one – the face is young with the regular and noble but slightly abstracted features.



Fig. 2. The sculptural group located in a corner aedicule of a second floor level of the townhouse situated in 23, Rynok Square. Photo by S. Linda, 2021

Thus, we have a total composition of the Theophany: Eternal God personified in God the Father and God the Son, which is present invisibly (beyond the aedicule) at the moment of Jesus Christ christening in the waters of the Jordan and via the voice of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove goes down to Jesus confirming His Divine nature and blessing the beginning of His sacrificial earthly way.

But yet, it isn't the whole content hidden in the silence of the stone sculptures today. Moreover, we can see the arms of the two notable families on the pedestal of the sculptural group as well as the portrait representations of their primary members on the pedestals of the aedicule flanking pilasters. These portrayals are situated behind the figure of the "Faith". For the clue of the total content of this complicated notional composition one should only utter the words of the main dogmatic prayer "The Symbol of Faith" out of the mouths of this allegory [4]:

1. "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible" - left image above the aedicule;
2. "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, the only-begotten, born of the Father before all ages" – right Mascarons above the aedicule;
3. "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, and became man" – christening composition;
4. "... He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and of His Kingdom there will be no end" – we turn to the right Mas-

caron above the aedicule turned towards the East);

5. "And in the Holy Spirit the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets" – the dove with straightened wing, which suspends over the figures of John and Jesus crowning the composition of the aedicule;
6. "In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" – figure of the "Faith";
7. "I profess one baptism for the remission of sins. I expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen" – these words should be belonged to the images of the families representatives.

It is evident that both arms symbolize the two great families: Sholts-Volfovychs (almost lost) and Gazes and the Mascarons on the pilaster pedestals of the aedicule are the portraits of their best known members. Frozen in stone and protected with the shield of the "Faith" they let us know about their waiting for resurrection and the Second Christ Advent.

Conclusion

Sculptural décor of the Renaissance townhouses yet conceals a lot of mysteries waiting for the clues. The content interpretation of aedicule sculptural group of Sholts-Volfovychs house in Lviv, which is usually named as «Epiphany», points to the considerably deeper meanings put by the creators. It is entirely possible that we deal with the visualization of one of the most important Christian prayers, namely, "The Symbol of Faith" and the sculptural composition can be considered to be the corner chancel of the building. The

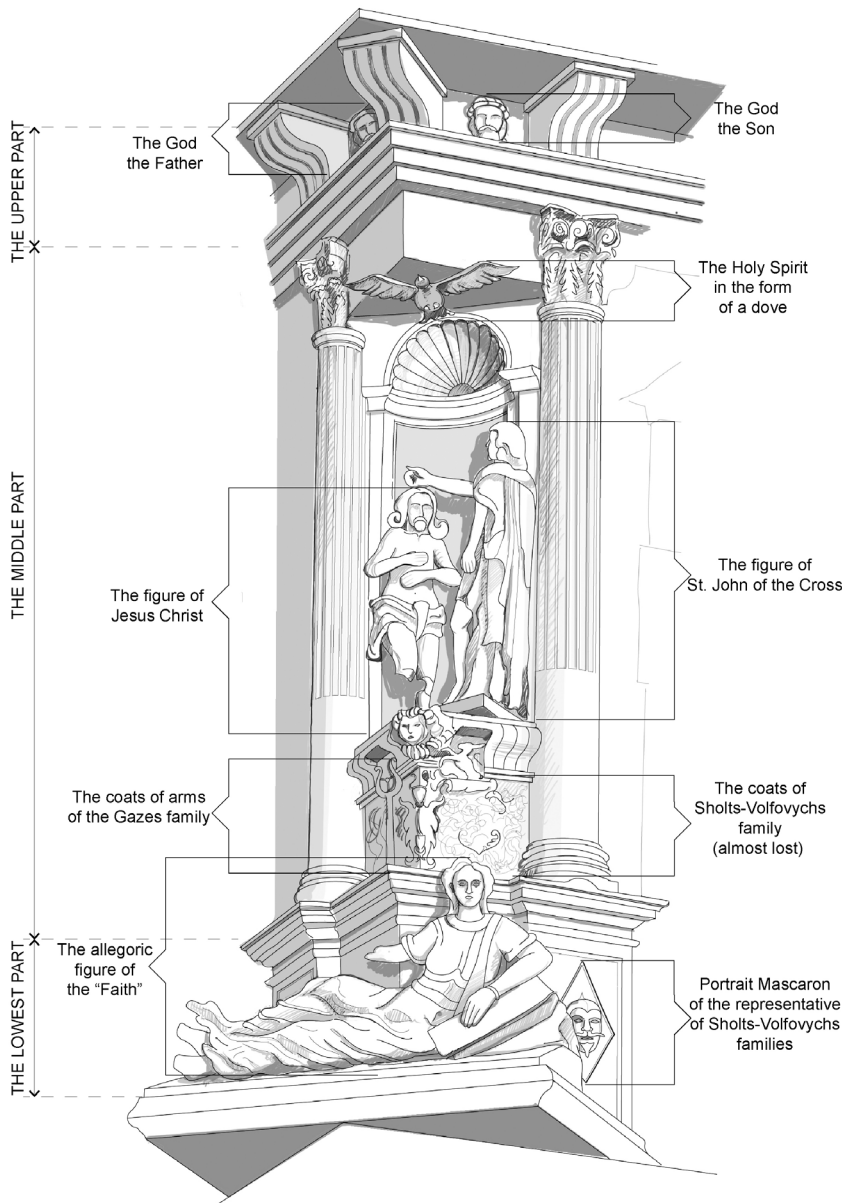


Fig. 3. Scheme of the components of the sculptural group. Drawn by S. Linda, 2021

décor of the house manifests us the prevalent place of God in the human life of the Renaissance period.

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PRAWIDŁOWY SPOSÓB CYTOWANIA
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Abstract: The specific conditions of architectural development in Lviv promoted the expansion of the Renaissance traditions in the architecture in the XVI century. The local traditions considerably influenced the classical forms as well as techniques suggested by the Italian architects. As a result, the architecture of Lviv had taken the peculiar features that reflected the character of an indigenous

revival. A significant feature of a Renaissance townhouse in Lviv lies in its abundant decoration. Sculptural décor is of special interest, as it was created according to the symbolic ideas and was filled with the philosophic content.

The façade of Sholts-Volfovychs apartment house situated in 23, Rynok Square in Lviv deserves special attention. The abundant exterior design includes the composition «Epiphany», located in the aedicule of the second floor. Using the principle of hermeneutics the article presents the author's interpretation of a symbolic meaning of this sculptural composition, based on the Gospel texts and is connected with the Renaissance meditations about a human place in the world and his/her relationship with God.

Keywords: renaissance, architecture, Lviv, sculpture decor, symbolism

Streszczenie. SYMBOLIKA RZEŻBY RENESANSOWEJ: AEDICULA KAMIENICY SZOLC-WOLFOWICZÓW WE LWOWIE. Specyficzne warunki rozwoju Lwowa przyczyniły się do upowszechnienia się tradycji renesansowych w architekturze w XVI wieku. Na klasyczne formy i techniki wniesione przez włoskich architektów znaczący wpływ miały tradycje lokalne. W efekcie architektura Lwowa nabrała specyficznych cech, które przesądziły o charakterze miejscowego odrodzenia. Ważną cechą renesansowej kamienicy we Lwowie była jej bogata dekoracja. Szczególnie interesujący był wystrój rzeźbiarski, który podlegał nie tylko estetycznym, ale także symbolicznym ideom oraz był wypełniony treścią filozoficzną.

Na szczególną uwagę zasługuje fasada kamienicy Szolc-Wolfowicza, znajdującej się przy placu Rynek 23. Wśród bogatego wystroju jest kompozycja „Chrzest”, umieszczona w aedicule na poziomie drugiego piętra. W niniejszym artykule na podstawie analizy hermeneutycznej została przedstawiona autorska interpretacja symbolicznego znaczenia kompozycji rzeźbiarskiej opartej na tekstach ewangelicznych. Całość jest ściśle powiązana z rozważaniami renesansu o miejscu człowieka w świecie i jego relacjach z Bogiem.

Słowa kluczowe: renesans, architektura, Lwów, dekoracje rzeźbiarskie, symbolika